



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE OUTLINES PROPOSALS
FOR WOLF REINTRODUCTION IN YELLOWSTONE AND CENTRAL IDAHO**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking comment on proposals to establish experimental populations of wolves in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho, Service Director Mollie Beattie announced today. The proposed rules outline how the Service would conduct reintroductions and the manner in which wolves would be managed once released.

The rules, one addressing reintroduction in Yellowstone National Park and the other for central Idaho, outline proposed reintroduction methods and designate wolves in each area as "non-essential, experimental" under Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act. This provision of the Act allows Federal and state resource agencies and private citizens greater flexibility in managing reintroduced animals.

Specifically, such a designation would allow wolves to be killed, under certain conditions, if they are preying upon livestock. Although unlikely, if wild populations of deer, elk, and other large game are severely affected by wolf predation, wolves could be moved under an approved management plan.

Under the Service's proposals, wolves within the boundaries of two areas--one in and near Yellowstone National Park and the other in and around the central Idaho wilderness area--would be designated as non-essential experimental. Neither of these areas currently supports wolf packs. The proposed experimental population area for the Yellowstone region includes the entire State of Wyoming, a portion of southeastern Idaho east of Interstate 15, and a portion of Montana east of Interstate 15 and south of the Missouri River. The central Idaho experimental population area would include portions of Idaho and Montana south of Interstate 90 and west of Interstate 15.

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The Service's current wolf management program in the northern Rocky Mountains allows the agency to move or kill the occasional wolf that preys on livestock, and that program would continue. In addition, the proposed rules would allow private property owners and livestock owners with grazing leases on public land to harass adult wolves without injuring them to discourage conflicts with domestic animals, but would also require those owners to report such incidents. On private property within the experimental areas, landowners could kill wolves in the act of wounding or killing livestock, but would be required to report the incident within 24 hours, and physical evidence of the attack would be required. Killing wolves on public land by private citizens would require a permit and would be an option only after attempts to relocate problem wolves had failed.

The Service proposes to establish wolf populations by reintroducing wild wolves from Alberta and British Columbia, Canada. Over the next 3 to 5 years, about 30 wolves annually (15 for each site) would be trapped in Canada and released in Yellowstone National Park and on U.S. Forest Service lands in central Idaho.

Two different release methods are proposed. In Yellowstone, groups of adults and their offspring would be placed in 1-acre enclosures to allow them to acclimate to the area within the park. After about 2 months, they would be radio-collared and released. Biologists would track their movements and provide supplemental feeding if necessary. This release technique is designed to encourage released animals to remain in or near the park.

The releases in central Idaho would consist of groups of young wolves from various packs. They would be fitted with radio collars and freed as soon as possible after arriving at the release site. This technique, which does not include an acclimation period, is proposed for central Idaho because the remote release site's rough terrain makes access difficult for program biologists. In addition, biologists believe the region's steep valleys will help keep wolves within the release area. After becoming oriented to the area, the released wolves are expected to behave as naturally occurring wolves. They will disperse, find mates, and form packs, primarily within the 12 million acres of national forest land in central Idaho.

The proposed rules reflect the recommendation outlined in a final environmental impact statement on wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone and central Idaho recently completed by the Service. The EIS explored options for wolf reintroduction in order to effect recovery of the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains.

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Gray wolves were common in the northern Rocky Mountains prior to 1870. As human settlement intensified and prey species such as deer, elk, and bison declined, wolf populations fell. Settlers and government trappers, fearing for the safety of livestock, carried out successful campaigns to exterminate wolves in the Rocky Mountain area.

While it is generally agreed that wolves could eventually repopulate the Yellowstone and central Idaho ecosystems on their own, the process could take decades to occur. Should wolves reestablish themselves naturally, they would receive full protection of the Endangered Species Act, with significantly less management flexibility. Under this proposed reintroduction, wolf populations are expected to recover by 2002.

Complete details of the two proposed rules were published in the August 16 Federal Register. The Service will accept comments on the two rules until October 15. During that time, public hearings will be scheduled at several locations nationwide, including Cheyenne, Wyoming; Helena, Montana; Boise, Idaho; Salt Lake City, Utah; Seattle, Washington; and Washington, DC. Details on these hearings will be announced at a later date. Once the comment period has ended and the Service has reviewed public input, the agency will publish the final rules in the Federal Register. To submit comments or for more information, contact Gray Wolf Reintroduction, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 8017, Helena, Montana 59601.